

BWC Strategy Session

Promoting BWC Among Colleges and Universities

On June 8, 2005 Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) continued its 2005 Strategy Session series to provide network members with information on transportation demand management (TDM) programs offered at colleges and universities. Kevin Tingley, BWC team member, provided opening administrative remarks, informed the participants that the Association for Commuter Transportation is hosting a netconference on June 29th entitled "New Approaches to Reduced Car Use for Campus Communities." Speakers are Spenser Havlick and Will Toor authors of "Transportation & Sustainable Campus Communities; Issues, Examples, & Solutions."

Details about how to participate in the ACT netconference are available at <www.actweb.org>.

Mr. Tingley then introduced the featured speakers:

Connie Ruth, program manager, U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Brian Shaw, director of alternative transportation, Emory University

Why Colleges and Universities?

Ms. Ruth explained that colleges and universities have many features that suit TDM activities. For instance, parking is in high demand and while pay scales tend to be lower than the commercial sector, employees are forced to pay high prices for available parking spaces. In addition, land is expensive and should be used for academic buildings or green spaces rather than parking lots. Finally, Ms. Ruth suggested that employer-provided commuter benefits serve as an employee recruiting and retention tool to find and keep the best talent.

Recruiting Tips

Ms. Ruth suggested identifying and prioritizing local colleges and universities. Online search engines such as <<http://education.yahoo.com>> can provide a starting point. Ms. Ruth emphasized that recruiters should include community colleges in their searches since many are located in urban and suburban areas, are serviced by mass transit, and accommodate a high number of commuters. The next step is to develop a list of suitable contacts at these institutions through personal relationships, board members, etc. Finally, recruiters should contact employees in human resources, public relations, or transportation/parking departments. She recommended identifying issues that each college or university is facing such as parking shortfalls, community tension and "town-gown" issues (conflicts between locals—"town"—and university affiliated people—"gown"), or increased traffic due to construction projects, which will help persuade employers to initiate commuter benefit programs and apply for the BWC designation.

Ms. Ruth described an effective marketing or recruiting plan, which can include a competition or local challenge, invitation letters or emails, and active recruiting via phone calls or in-person meetings, or other creative approaches designed to get attention. Mr. Ruth added that recruiters should expect challenges such as difficulty reaching decision makers. However, the BWC team has developed a case study that depicts the extraordinary costs colleges and universities pay for parking and compares these expenses with the cost of transit and vanpool subsidies. Ms. Ruth recommended using the cost-savings information in recruiting plans.

Emory University

Mr. Shaw explained that Emory University has been part of the BWC program since its inception in 2001. However, the university has been involved in

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TDM work since the early 1990s. Mr. Shaw noted that BWC provides additional recognition and legitimacy to Emory's local TDM programs and serves as a connection to transportation demand issues across the country.

Mr. Shaw described the parking situation at Emory, which is located in Atlanta, GA. The university needs to limit building additional parking and is actually removing some spaces since all available land is used to support growth of the university. Mr. Shaw estimated that a single parking space costs the university approximately \$10,000 to construct plus thousands more to maintain and secure, which is more than the cost of providing a transit subsidy to one employee for 30 years. He added that Emory has fully subsidized transit and has provided significant discounts for vanpoolers and carpoolers for more than 10 years. In addition, Emory charges for parking as a deterrent for single-occupant transportation, which is also important to increase participation rates. Finally, Mr. Shaw added that Emory's shuttles service the entire community, not just students and faculty, and the fleet includes five buses running on electricity.

Open Discussion

- Alisa Mattison Price from the Downtown Minneapolis TMO asked if recruiters tend to notice a difference between private companies and public institutions. Ms. Ruth explained that some public institutions, such as colleges and universities, might have union representation or political sensitivities that require equal benefits for all employees. This is not always the case with private employers. Ms. Price also asked if one sector tends to offer more comprehensive benefits than the other. Ms. Ruth explained that the BWC team is promoting colleges and universities specifically because they have so much potential and many already provide outstanding benefits that meet or exceed the national standard.
- A participant from South Florida Commuter Services explained that she is working with a

private university and they are worried about liability associated with carpooling. Ms. Ruth mentioned that BWC emphasizes employee, not student, commuter benefits. Mr. Shaw added that Emory offers a carpool program that is entirely voluntary. Since carpooling is not required and parking passes are available, the university is not liable for students or employees choosing to use the service. Another participant added that employers in New Jersey were worried about liability associated with workman's compensation. However, a few years ago the state passed a ridesharing law, which protects employers from lawsuits related to ride-sharing.

- Mark Evanoff from AlterNetWays Company stated that his company offers rideshare-matching services to many universities across the country.
- A participant asked how colleges and universities monitor students using emergency ride home (ERH) services. Mr. Shaw explained that Emory's ERH program excludes students because of scheduling and approval reasons. In addition, the Atlanta Regional Commission provides ERH services and also excludes students. Michelle Romano Rockwood from VPSI noted that the University of Michigan's vanpool program also excludes students. Steve Offutt from EPA pointed out that it is not necessary to provide ERH services to students in order to qualify for BWC.
- A participant asked what strategies colleges and universities use to target students for ridesharing. Mr. Shaw explained that his transportation department advertises year round but targets students especially at the beginning of each academic year. Advertising includes ridesharing flyers with parking passes, online and newspaper ads, and recognition events for students and staff who get to campus without driving alone. Mr. Shaw added that students are particularly difficult to convince to change commute modes once they are accustomed to driving alone and parking on campus.
- Melissa Vignes from South Florida Commuter Services is working with the University of Miami and asked Mr. Shaw if Emory allows freshman to

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park on campus and if he works with an advisory committee. Mr. Shaw stated that Emory does not allow freshmen to park on campus due to limited parking and to help develop a sense of community among incoming students. Mr. Shaw also added that student groups and faculty get together to offer guidance and make decisions regarding transportation and parking policies. In addition, the student government at Emory set up a task force to investigate transportation demand at the university and has developed a carpool program specifically for students.

- David Williamson from Georgia Tech explained that while his university is not yet a BWC, they do provide similar programs to those offered by Emory. Mr. Williamson pointed out that he is available as a resource if other participants would like advice. Renee Callaway from the University of Wisconsin-Madison also noted that her university provides only 300 parking spaces for 40,000 students.
- Mr. Tingley provided information on the high costs required to develop and maintain parking compared to the low costs of transit subsidies and other commuter benefits. According to Unlimited Access, a study published by the University of California-Los Angeles, a free bus pass system costs an average university \$30 per student per year. In contrast, students spend approximately \$2392 per year to drive to campus and park. Therefore, unlimited access transportation programs lower the cost for students to attend college. Mr. Shaw noted that Emory's graduate students are most receptive to transportation assistance.
- Ms. Ruth suggested that for some universities with significant land resources or in regions with poor transportation infrastructures, a transit subsidy for rail or buses may not be a good fit. However, a transit subsidy for vanpools has a great deal of promise. Making sure that university personnel understand that vanpool companies can operate a vanpool program directly with their staff can remove a perceived (and inaccurate) obstacle that it is necessary for the university or college to own a

fleet of vans. Ms. Rockwood noted that VPSI runs the University of Michigan's vanpool program, which is cheaper for the institution since they no longer need to pay for vehicle insurance, maintenance, gas, repairs, etc.

- Ms. Ruth suggested that some universities with significant land resources or in regions with poor transportation infrastructures, a transit subsidy might not be the best alternative. Other options include vanpools, which can be administered externally. Ms. Rockwood noted that VPSI runs the University of Michigan's vanpool program, which is cheaper for the institution since they no longer need to pay for vehicle insurance, maintenance, gas, repairs, etc.
- A participant stated that colleges and universities often market transportation solutions to students and asked for suggestions on how to include faculty and staff in the promotions. Mr. Shaw mentioned that Emory promotes alternative transportation all year with fairs, a list serve, Internet ads, and other employee communications. Ms. Rockwood added that the University of Michigan includes vanpool information with parking passes, which are applicable to staff as well as students.
- David Kapalko from the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston explained that his university implemented a work-life subsidy of \$30 per month to all employees. However, the subsidy was not provided pre-tax. Ms. Ruth noted that there are significant differences between medical and transit pre-tax systems and suggested that they speak about this offline.

Closing

Mr. Tingley closed the discussion and informed the participants that a summary of the strategy session will be available on the BWC Web site at www.bwc.gov/support/seminars.htm. Mr. Tingley mentioned that the next session on BWC Districts will be held on July 27, 2005, and he encouraged everyone to join the BWC Network and take advantage of the tools and resources available to Network members.